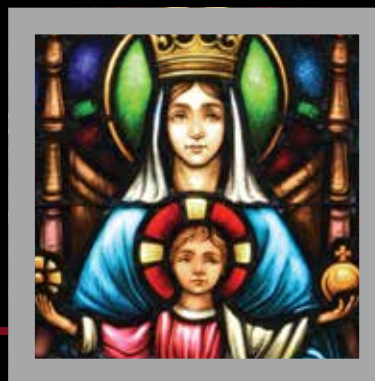
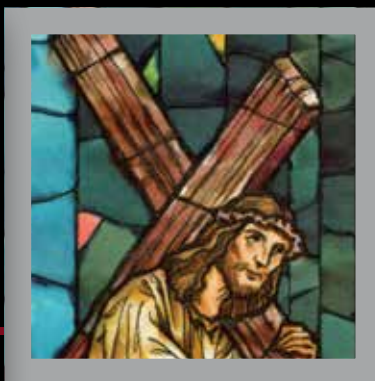
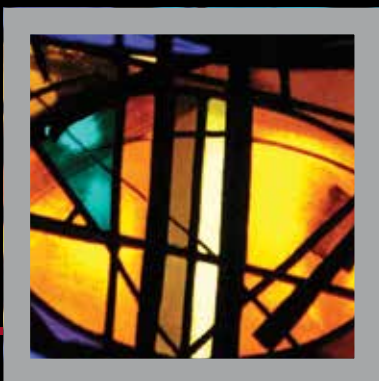
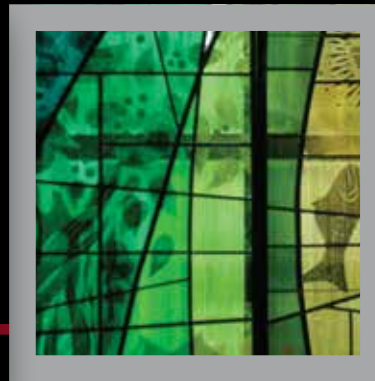
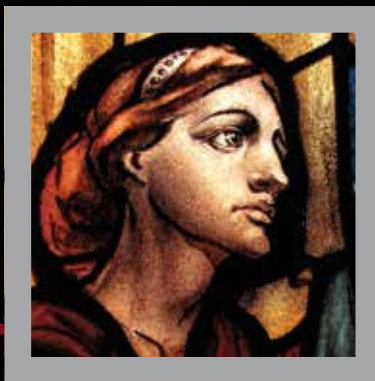
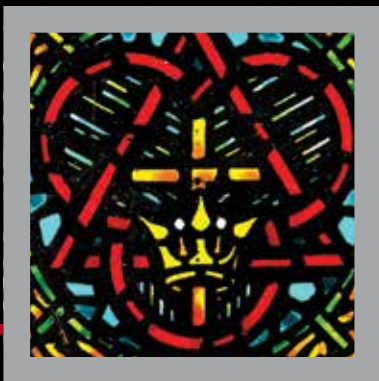




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**Theme Issue:
Spiritual
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CONTENTS

THEME ISSUE: SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPES

Sacred Presence In Architecture and Landscape

By Michael J. Crosbie 6

A Procession of Sacred Green Space

By Michael Stern, ASLA 11

Landscape and Sanctuary: Grace Farms

By Karla Cavarra Britton 14

Sacred Landscapes: Meanings and Contradictions

By Norman Crowe 20

Healing Gardens As Transformative Spaces

By Virginia Burt, FCSLA, FASLA 22

The Un-Cloister

By Thomas Fisher, Assoc. AIA 24

The Sacred Language of Trees

By A.T. Mann 26

Bankston Green

By James Powell, AIA 30



ON THE COVER:

Garden Pavilion by Shim-Sutcliffe Architects (article begins on page 6). Photo: Raimund Koch

DEPARTMENTS

Editor's Page	4
Notes & Comments	31
Architects Directory	32
Artist/Artisan Directory	32
The Last Word	34

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

ArchNewsNow.com	35	J. Sussman, Inc.	34
Connecticut Architecture Foundation	5	KML	4
Conrad Schmitt Studios	5	Subscribe to Faith & Form	35
Dekker Perich Sabatini	35	The Verdin Company	35
Faith & Form Fall 2016 Theme Issue	5	Willet Hauser Architectural Glass, Inc.	2
Faith & Form/IFRAA Awards Program	36		

NEXT ISSUE

A potpourri of articles on the best in religious art and architecture



MILLENNIALS' VIEWS OF RELIGION TAKE A DIVE

EDITOR'S PAGE * MICHAEL J. CROSBIE

Millennials have spoken, and they don't much care for organized religion. New research from the Pew Research Center confirms that a trend that has been obvious for several years has picked up speed: Millennials' favorable view of churches and religious organizations fell from 73 percent to 55 percent in just five years, one of the sharpest declines ever. While the views of Gen-Xers, Boomers, and Silents (85 percent of those over 65) have grown modestly more positive about churches and organized religion over the past five years, rising between 2 and 7 percent, the positive views of Millennials nose-dived 18 percent. Just over half of Millennials now believe that churches have a positive impact on the country. Not surprisingly, they are more unlikely to be religious than any other age demographic in the country.


What is also surprising about this latest Pew study is that Millennials have grown more negative about the national news media, a trait that they share with all the other demographic age groups. The opinion of all four demographic

groups is more negative today about the news media than it was five years ago. But while the positive outlook of age groups other than Millennials regarding the national news media fell only slightly (between 1 and 4 percentage points) the positive view of the news media by Millennials fell from 40 percent to 27 percent, when asked if the national news media are having a positive impact on the way things are going in the country.

Here's another surprising finding regarding Millennials: overall, they are more positive about the nation's key institutions than others in the U.S., except when it comes to religious institutions. No one in the country has a dimmer view about churches and organized religion than Millennials. Pew surveyed people in the U.S. regarding all kinds of institutions. The list of categories includes labor unions, colleges and universities, small business, the energy industry, technology companies, the entertainment industry, large corporations, and banks and financial institutions, along with national news media and churches/religious organizations. Overall, the institution best regarded by all age groups was small business. The entertainment industry was a close

second in universal disdain, right behind the national news media. But in every category except organized religion, the Millennials were the most positive of all the other age groups. This means that Millennials are the most upbeat people in the country when it comes to their views of key institutions, but their trust in churches and organized religion is the lowest among the country's population.

Why do just a bit under half of Millennials have such negative views of organized religion, particularly in light of the fact that they are more positive than most when it comes to other institutions? The study doesn't get into the reasons why Millennials believe what they report, but here are some other survey data to think about. In 2014 and 2015, the Barna Group surveyed the same demographic groups about their views of Pope Francis. When asked if the pope had improved one's view of the Catholic Church, of all the age groups Millennials reported the biggest positive change: thanks to the pope, their view of one of the world's oldest organized religions improved, from 27 percent to 49 percent (it actually went down for Boomers and Silents).

Go figure. 

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Sacred Presence in Architecture and Landscape

An Interview with Brigitte Shim and Howard Sutcliffe

The architecture of Toronto-based firm Shim-Sutcliffe Architects connects landscape with architecture, probing the spiritual dimensions of both. Partners Brigitte Shim, Hon. FAIA, and Howard Sutcliffe, Hon. FAIA, who are also married to each other, talk about their award-winning architecture and the role of landscape design and the presence of nature as elements that evoke the sacred.



Photo: Raimund Koch

Architects Howard Sutcliffe and Brigitte Shim.

Michael J. Crosbie: Let's start at the beginning, with your first project, the Garden Pavilion in Toronto. How does it continue to influence you?

Brigitte Shim: It's interesting to think about our first project having many of the issues that we still think about many years later. This project had no doors, no windows, the only mechanical system was for a pump. We looked at the scale of landscape, the scale of the built form, the scale of the furniture, light fixtures, the bridges. We thought about the horizon line, the role of retaining walls.

Howard Sutcliffe: Retrospectively it became the DNA for a lot of things we are still working on. As a sacred condition, I grew up in nature, hiking and climbing. How do you make something as incredible as nature, manmade, in this sacred environment? Whether nature is godly or sacred is another question. But there is a respect for nature. The walls are essentially ruins, transitional conditions between nature and building. It's been embraced by nature, engaged by the site.

BS: I think it's a place of contemplation. Weddings have taken place here. It is a significant moment in the city. Toronto is a city of river valleys and ravines, so to be perched over the city with a panoramic view is a very special place. The selection of materials was very important, such as concrete, which is worked and marked and chipped away to express its



Garden Pavilion and Reflecting Pool, Shim and Sutcliffe's earliest project, shortly after completion in 1989 and compared to how it appears today (see front cover).

Photo: James Dow

holding the earth back. The rusting steel is part of the natural process of aging, compared to the wood, which has its own lifespan.

HS: The idea of building time into the project is important. It is embracing the project, and how materials change over time. It acknowledges the fact that materials weather.

MJC: And over time one comes to visit this place, and its weathering has an existential message for the visitor. What is the evolution of the importance of landscape in your work?

BS: Many of the same issues are revisited in many sites and programs.

HS: Most of our projects have landscape/garden metaphors, urban or rural, sacred or secular. Many people have said many of our secular spaces feel sacred, even in a house. Light for us is fundamental in these works.

MJC: Temple Bet Ha'am in Portland, Maine, which won a 2013 Faith & Form/IFRAA Award, is a very good example of that.

HS: The idea of light bringing materials to life is fundamental to what architects do. It's different than using artificial light. It is a bit like water in that way—suddenly there is life in that project. There's a presence. Water and light is part of our material palette.

BS: Bet Ha'am started with a flat roof. As the project went into fund raising we were also working on a small studio/garage. It was a simple space but we learned a lot from it, about how to capture light. We came back to the synagogue and suggested a shaped ceiling to redirect the light with baffles, clerestories, and skylights. In this sacred space, the same group that gathered on Friday evening for service would come back on Saturday. On Friday they would bow to the sunset, and on Saturday morning they faced the other direction. It's an asymmetrical section that responds to the time of the year and the location of the sun. We turned the interior clapboard upside down so the thicker edges capture lines of light instead of casting shadows—to make the light palpable. At the end of the sacred space is a garden, with water coming down a scupper. Nature is part of the experience of this sacred space. The congregation embraced it from the beginning, they wanted to be part of nature, experiencing the seasons, which connected to the type of liturgy they read.

HS: The little model of the studio we designed showed us how the light comes into the space, creating thick walls of light. You



Natural light filters into the sanctuary of Congregation Bet Ha'am.

don't need a lot of light in there to create that effect, but the light has substance to it.

BS: Small projects can teach you things. The lessons of small projects can inform larger projects. They are quick, can be designed and built quickly, and what we learn can be applied in other projects.

MJC: For the Chapel of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, a 2014 Faith & Form/IFRAA Award-winning project, the presence of nature was an important part of the design, wasn't it?

HS: It was fundamental to the sisters that this sacred space have a direct relationship with nature. They saw God and the presence of nature as the same thing. The space folds in on itself, with a curved glazed wall that imbeds nature into the space. That was a fundamental condition, to make that work, instead of just looking out at nature.

MJC: The folded curve in the glass is the sacred presence of nature coming in.

BS: You are bringing nature in. You are in harmony with it.

MJC: The exterior of the chapel appears as a floating pavilion, embraced by nature.

BS: After one of the first services, the priest said that as he moved from behind the altar to stand in front of it, he could see the ravine and the neighborhood at the same time. You could embrace both. The building occupies a zone between the landscape and the city; in this long, thin building you could always see nature in relation to the city. The second floor is also part of this embrace, for the infirm sisters, who had to sit way in back of the previous chapel. Now they are on the second floor mezzanine overlooking the space and are part of it. It is both intimate and expansive. There was a ravine restoration plan, because before this project was built it was a dumping ground, uncared for. Part of the project was to heal the ravine. It was a journey of taking something under-valued and making nature a focal point



Photos: James Dow

The interior of the Chapel of the Sisters of St. Joseph allows nature of dwell within.

of the sacred experience.

MJC: At St. Catherine's Chapel at Massey College in the University of Toronto, you created a feeling of being under trees. It feels very primal.

HS: It is in a basement, but we found ways to create the illusion of daylight. The chapel was part of the original building designed by Ron Thom and we were asked to renovate it. The walls were covered with red-painted pebbles, and the arches were plaster. It was grotto-like. The blue wall is spatial, it suggests the sky. It's very strong and animates the space. The icon on that wall was donated by author Robertson Davies, the first Master of Massey College.

BS: It was part of the history of the college, an existing space that was revitalized. We cladded the plaster arches in white oak, with integrated lighting, and a new slate floor over what had been red asbestos tile.

MJC: The Wong Dai Sin Temple, which is part of the global variety of cultures in Toronto,



A surrounding ravine embraces the Chapel of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Photo: Bob Gaudu



Wong Dai Sin Temple situated in its suburban Thornhill neighborhood.

Photo: James Dow

seems very sensitively sited in its suburban neighborhood.

HS: It's a pretty quirky, varied area, an odd location, with suburban houses around it and a shopping center just down at the corner. They bought a suburban house they thought they would renovate into a temple with parking in the back.

BS: The neighbors went ballistic. Close-by is a large Buddhist temple, a mosque, and a synagogue. So when any of these groups gather, there are cars parked all over that spill out onto the suburban residential roads. The by-laws regarding parking in these neighborhoods are very rigid to protect the residents. The only way this would work was to raise the building up so you could park underneath it, with a cantilever in both directions instead of columns. We showed them a model of the building and they said, "whip horse"—a tai chi move. Daoism is one of the oldest religions in the world, connecting the physical, tai chi, to the spiritual. The neighbors were resistant, but we got a very positive planning report because of our sustainable site strategy, not impacting anyone's view. The upper room is a memorial hall that had originally been planned for tai chi, but they shifted the program. We turned the rectilinear skylights into round ones, and included wire-brushed cedar paneling to give it a sense of age. The concrete floor accommodates the incense. Now, they use the space outside under the cantilever for tai chi.

MJC: Tell me about the Corten steel on the temple. It is so rich in its relationship with nature.

HS: We have used Corten right from the beginning of our work. It registers the act of weathering, it has an emphatic material quality. In most of our projects we have used wood and Corten because they are rich and textural. It's the antithesis of an aluminum and glass curtain wall system, because that is machine made and the human condition is removed, you have no relationship to it.

BS: The Corten, especially at Wong Dai, becomes an abstract landscape in itself.

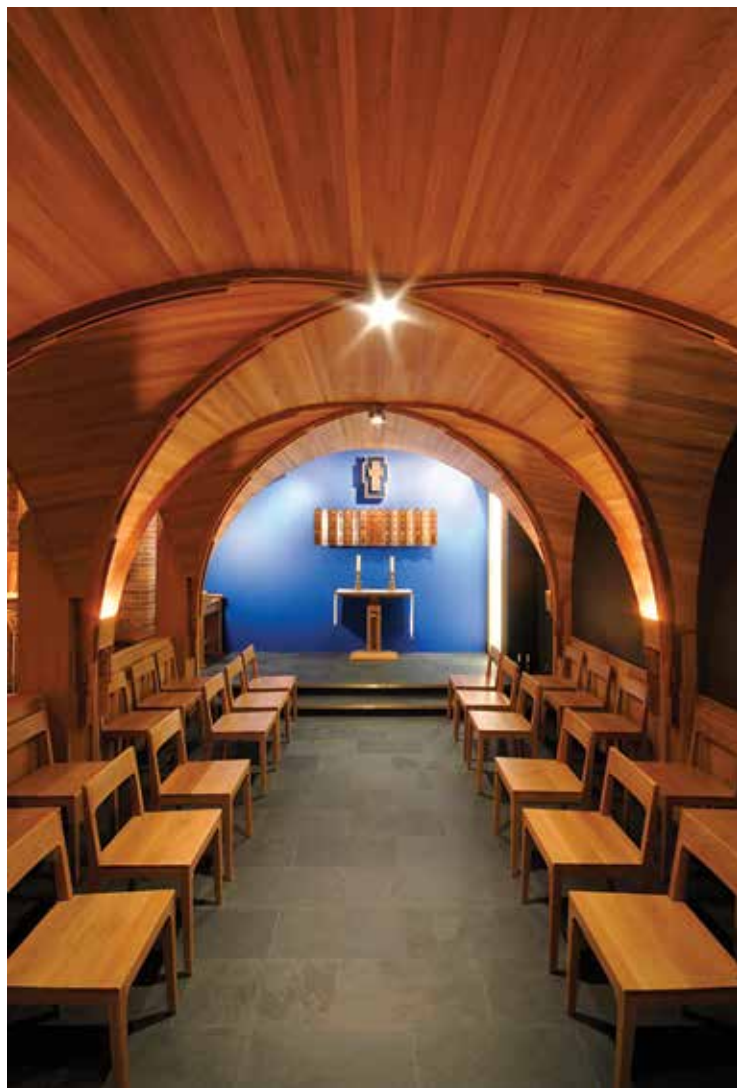
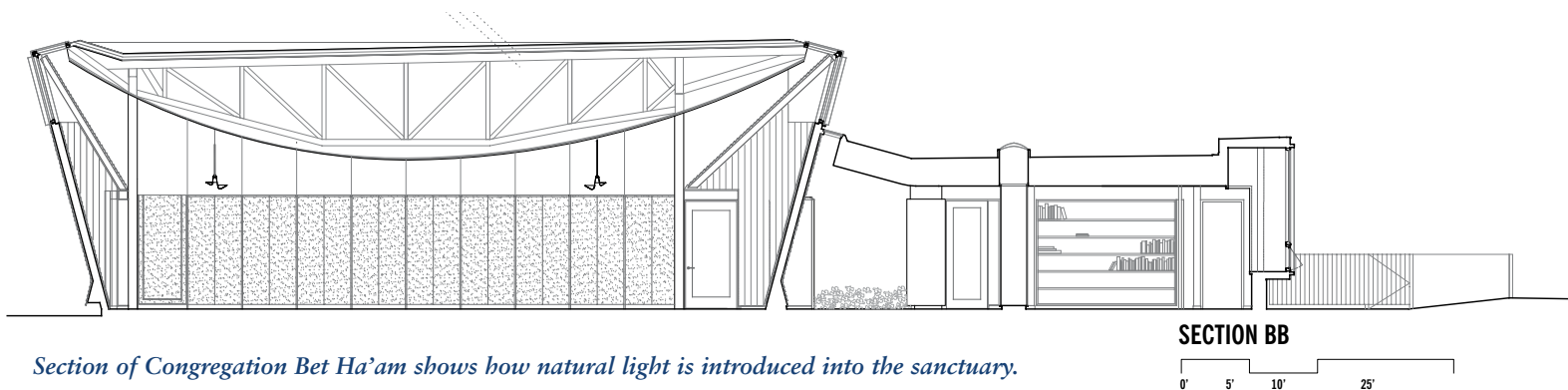
MJC: Let's compare that project to Atherley, which is for a faith tradition that you don't have first-hand experience with. How do you approach a project such as this?

HS: We cover a range of projects in different faith traditions that we don't know first-hand, outside the Anglican, Catholic traditions. We seem to attract these projects.

BS: The sacred place at Atherley is based on plentitude, on gathering in nature. Our client is the Mjinkaning Fish Fence Circle Group. There is a cluster of sticks in the water that has been there for 5,000 years, located at the



Memorial hall of Wong Dai Sin Temple is punctuated by round skylights and a deep blue ceiling that suggest the visual remnants of incense.



Above: The Atherley Narrows project will allow access over ancient fishing weirs, a sacred site to the First Nations Chippewas of Rama and a Canadian national heritage site.

Left: The rejuvenated St. Catherine's Chapel at Massey College suggests an allee of trees.


narrows between two lakes. This is where First Nations people gathered the fish, in order to hold them, so they would be plentiful for sacred occasions. We work with Chippewas, who see themselves as stewards of these fishing weirs. But the weirs themselves are under water; you can't see them. Our project is to design a pedestrian and snowmobile bridge across the waters that will connect both sides, and the bridge has to represent something you will never see. There is a sacred space that

allows a place for gathering and drumming. Under the bridge is an interpretive center. We just received our environmental assessment, so it is poised to go forward. But it will take a long time. For the First Nations it's about a sacred landscape, not just a sacred space. The connection to the water is fundamental.

MJC: How amazing to work on a project that is 5,000 years old that you can't see.

BS: That's what the discipline of architecture allows you to do: enter these worlds—those of

Catholic nuns, reformed synagogues, Daoism, First Nations—that you would know nothing about, especially with spiritual space. You have to enter them so completely to tap into who they are and what they value, and what matters to them.

HS: To make it meaningful to them, you have to synthesize. Each project has to be its own world. 

A Procession of Sacred Green Space

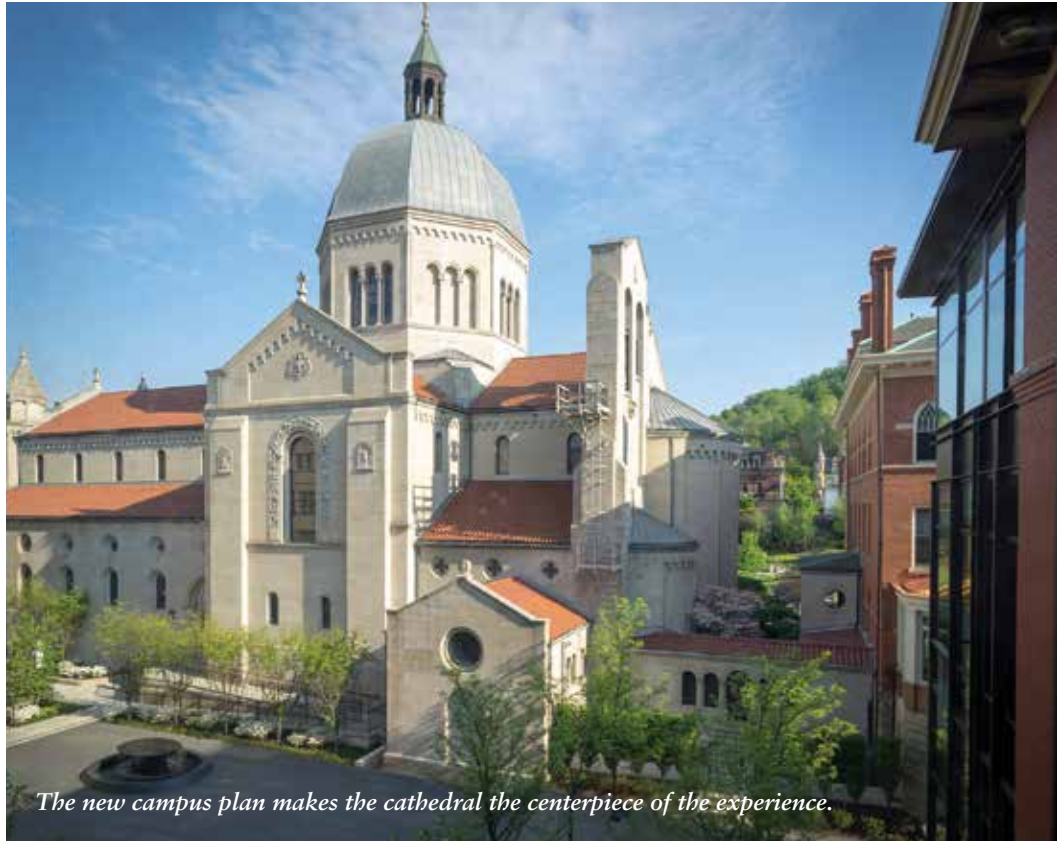
The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's new Cathedral Campus

By Michael Stern, ASLA | Photographs by Dennis Marsico

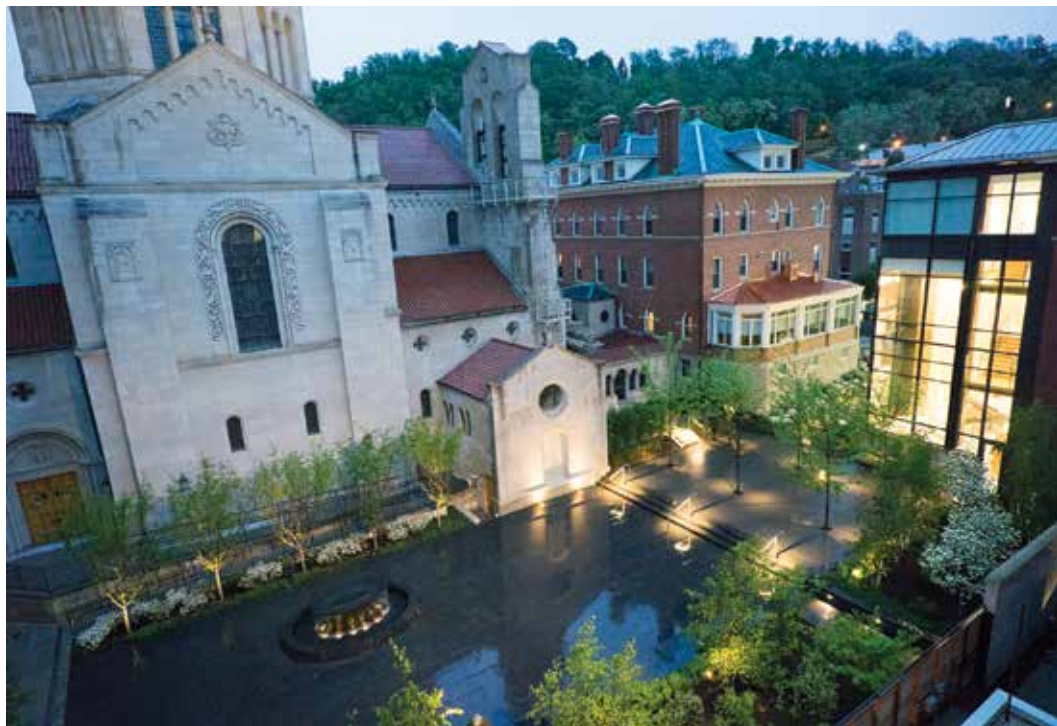
Sacred landscapes are perhaps the earliest example of human place making. They represent the recognition of a special place in the world—the *genius loci*—that is significant for the contemplation of the interaction of the human, natural, and spiritual worlds. Scholars as diverse as Mircea Eliade and Vincent Scully have written extensively about the historical and pre-historical relationship of humans and the landscapes they inhabit, and how natural elements such as mountains, forests, and seas have become generative of architectural interpretation as sacred places.

At the Wheeling, West Virginia, Cathedral Campus the challenge was smaller and more intimate, but the consistent design goal was the integration of interior and exterior places into a unified whole that would be inspirational as well as functional. The two principal exterior spaces—the Cathedral Plaza and the Marian Garden—resulted from a cross-disciplinary design and planning process with the goal of creating a unified set of places and experiences within the urban context, which create a new administrative and religious center for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. The design team—composed of landscape architects, architects, urban and interior designers—worked with the client to study numerous options in the historic center of Wheeling. The team developed a scheme that combines selective demolition, adaptive reuse of historic structures, and strategic additions to establish a new religious place surrounding the historic St. Joseph's Cathedral.

The Roman Catholic community of Wheeling—one of the earliest Western expansions of Catholicism in the US—has naturally been focused on the cathedral, constructed in 1926 as the successor structure to the original building from 1847 (which was destroyed in a fire). While it occupies a prominent corner location in central Wheeling, much of the remainder of the block was populated over time with less-worthy structures. A key opportunity emerged when the 1896 parish school next to the cathedral was closed. A captivating



The new campus plan makes the cathedral the centerpiece of the experience.



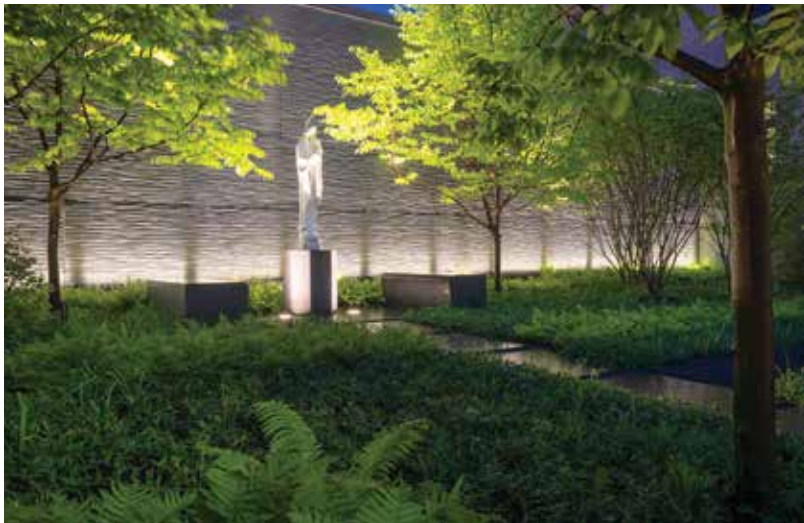
New fountain is on axis with cathedral transept, and a focus of the entry into the open space from the right in the photo.

THE AUTHOR IS A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT AND A PRINCIPAL OF STRADA, A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY DESIGN FIRM WITH OFFICES IN PITTSBURGH AND PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA.

SITE PLAN

Axial Relationships
Establishing visual relationships between new and old elements ties this composition together. The new Rectory Porch and Chancery additions frame the view to the fountain, which is aligned with the Cathedral dome. The statue of the Virgin Mary is framed through the bay window of the Rectory's dining room, venue of the Bishop's daily lunch gathering.

- LEGEND
- 1 Cathedral
 - 2 Chancery
 - 3 Rectory
 - 4 Rectory Porch Addition
 - 5 Archives
 - 6 High School (below)
 - 7 Bridge
 - 8 Courtyard
 - 9 Fountain
 - 10 Marian Garden
 - 11 Virgin Mary Statue
 - 12 Garage
- New Construction



Left, top: Processional staircase between the chancery addition to the left and rectory to the right, down to the campus's main outdoor space.

Left, below: Fountain is the focal point in the new landscaped outdoor space.

Above: Marian Garden is located on axis with and across the street from the rectory.

Facing page: Landscape gate design references the mountains and rivers of West Virginia.

redevelopment plan quickly emerged. To streamline and consolidate operations, the main curia offices would move from the cramped and undistinguished 1950s-era chancery to the renovated historic school—connected by a new bridge to the existing offices above the adjacent high school—and the diocesan archives would relocate the original chancery building.

To unify all of these elements and establish a fitting entrance to the new chancery, a nondescript 1930s addition to the historic school was demolished to make way for a new addition and an enclosed porch was added to the historic rectory. At the same time, a garage structure that served the rectory was replaced with a new facility rotated 90 degrees and entered from the rear. All of these architectural moves were considered as part of a campus plan that established two significant new public garden spaces. Each of these was in a sense a “found” space, but with its own distinct character, unified into a larger composition.

The Cathedral Plaza was the greatest revelation in that regard. The simple process of removing the additions to the historic parish school created a space that provided breathing room for the cathedral and revealed a previously unseen and dramatic view of the building. Framed by the chancery and rectory building additions, the entrance to the plaza descends through a gentle staircase that passes through the transitional space of the Honey Locust Bosque trees at an intermediate level, always on axis with the central fountain.

Intended as a sensual element that leads the visitor deeper into the space, the fountain occupies the intersection of the processional and the cathedral transept. Constructed of two large stones, one for the bowl and one the base, it loosely references fonts, tables, and altars in its form, as the water wells mysteriously from an unknown source and activates the space through sound and light. A statue of St. Joseph by a local West Virginia artist, relocated from the previous space, faces back to the fountain and the dome. The plaza was planned as both a ceremonial venue that could accommodate public ceremonies, as well as private events such as weddings, so most of the area is left open as neutral, flexible space.

In contrast, the Marian Garden was conceived as much as a visual element—a veritable theater set—as it was a garden space. Using the rear wall of the garage as a backdrop, this space is enclosed by two wing walls that frame it, clad in a textured, dark gray high-performance concrete. The dense, layered plantings create a sense of a woodland grove that focuses attention on the pure white marble statue of the Virgin Mary, directly opposite the bay window of the rectory dining room. Two granite benches frame the statue and provide a place of rest and contemplation.


The two garden spaces are connected in the use of materials as well. Black Minnesota Mesabi granite is used in a variety of finishes throughout the paving, fountain, and benches to establish a unifying “ground” that contrasts with the surrounding buildings. Native woodland plants are primarily used in both gardens. The yellowwood trees in the Marian Garden bloom in a profusion of fragrant white flowers, and with the blue flowers of the periwinkle and squill groundcovers reflect the Virgin Mary’s traditional colors. The larger scaled birch trees of the Cathedral Plaza will grow to create a visual screen for the rear of the adjacent high school building, providing shade for the rhododendrons, ferns, and other woodland plants below, and focus attention back towards the cathedral.

Using a contemporary yet historically sensitive design approach, the landscape goals of the project were to establish a new sense of place and identity that could uncover dramatic new spaces and engage all members of the community in an understated, experiential way—an orchestrated spatial experience from outside to inside. Natural elements of light, water, stone, trees, and flowers make their own subtle symbolic connections to those primal spiritual landscapes of pre-history, meant to evoke



an emotional response that supports the liturgical and spiritual mission of the Church. The power of this sacred landscape is cogently captured by Rev. Msgr. Frederick P. Annie, vicar general for the diocese:

“People interact with the spaces around the cathedral on many levels. During the journey from the car to the cathedral door or the entrance to our chancery, a conversation begins that invites the individual to leave behind the baggage and burdens of everyday life and prepare to enter into a deeper awareness of our spiritual selves. It is not necessary to stop and sit on a bench for a few moments of prayer, although that opportunity is present; just walking through a space that elevates our senses with authentic natural materials and artfully arranged plantings with sacred sculpture and an awareness of the natural and supernatural elements within each of us is a conversation that is amplified by the thought, skill, and talent of the sensitive designer.

“The fountain has a strong visual presence in the courtyard but also announces an audible invitation to come closer and to enjoy a turning within to an inner character reflective of the beauty found in the water feature itself. Whether one is arriving for work and is reminded by this journey that this is no ordinary workplace or approaching the cathedral to celebrate Mass there is a significant contribution made by this environment that prepares one for what happens next. Even descending a comfortably designed stairway into the plaza allows one to experience walking deeper into the mystery that lies ahead. These experiences can be very subtle and on many days individuals may not be aware of the transforming power of the space, yet on other days when light and fragrance and visual beauty combine, a true moment of grace may be achieved.” 

Landscape and Sanctuary: Grace Farms

By Karla Cavarra Britton

THE RELATIONSHIP OF LANDSCAPE TO RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE WAS re-addressed in fertile ways in the period following the Second World War. Vincent Scully, for example, following from his book *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, sought to treat landscape and temples as an architectural whole. Looking anew at ancient temples, pyramids, and kivas, he read sacred architecture in outline against the sea or sky, and in relation to plain, hilltop, mountain, and mesa. His examples were drawn not only from ancient Greece, but also such disparate sources as the Valley of the Kings of dynastic Egypt; pre-Columbian America; and the Tewa and Keres Indian pueblos of New Mexico. The natural landscape's relationship to sacred architecture, he argued, is often of paramount importance, for it embodies double meanings reflective of both the deity in nature and the god as imagined by humanity. Observing this link between landscape and temple as compact images of act and will, Scully argued, we may see the best man-made forms in their true dimension: not separate from the world but understood in balance with it, reflective both of what "men are and can make."¹

Similar metaphorical suppositions were also addressed by Le Corbusier through his intense engagement with the site for the chapel at Ronchamp, begun in 1950 and described by him in a single sentence: "Ronchamp? Contact with a site, location in a place, eloquence of a place, word addressed to a place."² Taking inspiration from the temples of the Acropolis as "landscape's reason," Le Corbusier designed his chapel in response to the contours of the mountainous setting. Here the building famously draws together the cardinal points and the horizons, encapsulating his concept of "ineffable space" as an appeal to the acoustics of the landscape. This acoustic analogy was developed in his account of the relationship of the building to its surroundings: as he wrote, Ronchamp was "an acoustic landscape, taking account of the four horizons; the plain of the Soane across from it, complementing the Ballon d'Alsace, and, on the sides, two valleys. We will create forms that will respond to the horizons and welcome them in."³ The outside, in other words, is also always an inside.⁴



A quintessential interpretation of Le Corbusier's principle of the outside/inside space comes in Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut—a glass temple structured so as to combine the interior with the exterior in the same space. Johnson intended the Glass House to be “skin and bones architecture,” setting its rear façade facing onto a sharp bluff, and on the opposite side giving it a view of the valley and a placement within its *repoussoir* of giant trees, approached through the meadow and copse. The entire relationship of the house to the sacred grove is—as he indicated in an essay in *Architectural Review* in September 1950—shaped by a lexicon of landscape types derived from the English 18th-century landscape tradition, as well as Schinkel and

Ledoux, the Baroque, the oblique view of the temples of the Acropolis, and even the spider web-like forms and footpaths of Le Corbusier's Farm Village Plan of 1933.

Charting these key explorations of the basic relationship between landscape and sanctuary in the post-war period helps provide one historical perspective on the new spiritual community center and church of Grace Farms (located not far from Philip Johnson's Glass House) in New Canaan. Sited on a former 80-acre horse farm, Grace Farms was designed by the prominent Tokyo-based firm SANAA, working in collaboration with the Philadelphia-based landscape architectural firm OLIN. (*continues next page*)



At Grace Farms, the line between indoors and outdoors is tenuous, as 'The River' building flows across the landscaped site.



'The River' winds its way through the landscape as a strand of light.

Photo: Dean Kaufman

Both the land and the building are a gift from the non-profit Grace Farms Foundation to the New Canaan community and are made available especially to Grace Farms Church as well as other select community groups. The form of the building is comprised, according to the architects, by their calculated intention to follow the contours of the sloping ground, offering dramatic views of the meadows, wetlands, and trees. Since the building's opening in October 2015, the popular media and the architectural press have already paid considerable attention to the sinuous, transparent form of "The River," as the building is called, and its client's deliberately stated intentions for an unbounded and hybrid program.

Yet already upon the approach to Grace Farms there are unmistakable hints that this building does not conform with the same kind of close reading of the relationship between landscape and temple as represented by Scully, Le Corbusier, and Johnson. The landscape does not represent either the human will and potential as expressed by Scully, nor the philosophical objectives of concordance expressed by Le Corbusier, nor the appeal of a set piece for historical landscape types as expressed by Johnson's Glass House. Rather, Grace Farms seems to confirm that a major realignment is currently underway in the study of concepts of the sacred and its relationship to architecture—one in which place, pluralism, and attention to the abstractions of nature have displaced the idea of a House of God.

For the popular imagination SANAA's architecture may be readily associated with a late-capitalist Shinto aesthetic, in which there exists an aura of restraint and minimalism and an overt attention to allowing nature itself to speak of a kind of sacred essence. Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, the lead architects of SANAA, have found their greatest opportunity to date for building in this vein in this Connecticut landscape haven, where relative isolation (despite being located in suburban New Canaan) is one of the major characteristics of the site. Nature plays the determinative role in The River. Grace Farms is intended as simultaneously a nature preserve, community center, and church, and The River building is essentially a long, low roof that protects a serpentine building sheathed in glass. There are transparent "pods" that enclose the programmatic spaces of Grace Farms: an auditorium (or worship space), a gymnasium, a library, kitchen and dining room, and tea house—each comprised of custom-designed glass panels. Yet there is a focus placed on "openness." For SANAA's two partners the idea of openness was underscored as well in their 2002 design for the New Museum in New York: "We design museums that concern themselves with the future by thinking about openness, which manifests itself as room for new possibilities...."²⁵ The River reflects this same intention to house any number of possible cultural functions, and so it deliberately lends itself to the spiritual projections



Visitors to Grace Farms pass between inside and outside.

Photo: Dean Kaufman

of its visitors rather than suggesting any fixed denominational point of reference.

In terms of “new” and experimental paradigms for religious buildings, it would be difficult to find a more conceptually revelatory example than Grace Farms. For while a portion of its building is overtly given over on Sunday morning to serve as a worship space, Grace Farms eschews in name and description any deliberate programmatic emphasis on liturgical functions. Instead, this project has multiple goals including communal gathering, artistic exploration, service, and the consideration of social justice. Indeed, the building’s very name—The River—signals a geographical landmark open to continuous interpretation. In this regard the self-descriptive “Architectural Directive” of Grace Farms is telling: “To create a venue of cultural interest and curiosity via open space, architecture, art and design in hopes of providing people with a chance to do the following: 1. Experience Nature ... 2. Participate in a Meaningful Community ... 3. Serve Others. ... 4. Explore Faith ...”⁶

The worship space itself transfers one’s attention away from the interiority of the building and any specific focus on the program of liturgy, toward the impinging spiritual presence of the natural world outside (whether it be a summertime field of green and wild flowers, or a winter scene of snow and ice). Here the ambiguous religious associations of the building are informed by the deliberately ambivalent assertion that

nature itself will be a driving spiritual force behind the architectural form of this “church.” Although Grace Community Church (the independent religious organization that inhabits the space) describes itself as “a church of action founded on Biblical truth characterized by faith, grace, community, service, authenticity, clear thinking, and cultural relevance,” one might observe that architecturally The River moves far beyond that intention by introducing a spiritual interaction with the natural environment as the backdrop, taking many of the performance-oriented aspects of the auditorium/worship space and putting them in relation to the landscape. So while the ethos of Grace Church is self-consciously oriented toward an emerging church ideal of the cultivation of community as “God’s dream for mankind [*sic*],”⁷ The River itself is ironically most strongly evocative of a more animistic ideal that is essentially individualistic and anonymous in character.

Grace Farms may be seen to pursue a cosmogonic model that merges the secular and the spiritual in the same place. Kenneth Frampton has described the sacred work of the Japanese modernist master Tadao Ando in relation to the term “secular spirituality.” With this deliberate tautology, Frampton argues that Ando’s work touches on the crisis that lies at the heart of a good deal of the late-modern world, where the continued existence of the sacred and profane can only be postulated in an environment in which consumption has



The sanctuary in 'The River' is contained by the surrounding landscape.



Photos: Ivan Baan

Sanctuary features artist Olafur Eliasson's 'Mat for Multidimensional Prayers'




- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Sanctuary | 4. Commons | 7. Hall Rehearsal Space | 11. Offices |
| 2. Library | 5. Pavilion | 8. Meeting Rooms | 12. Lounge |
| 3. Office | 6. Court | 9. Art Studio | 13. Athletic Field |
| | | 10. Plaza | |



Photo: Ivan Baan

Aerial view of 'The River,' barns, and pond.

come to dominate every form of human activity. In what is familiar to us by now as the idea that institutions such as the art museum stand in as the “surrogate religious institutions of our age,” he observes that spirituality itself has become one such form of aesthetic consumption, driven by an intention to overcome the split between the sacred and profane, and the body and soul, that are central to the ethos of monotheism. In terms reminiscent of Mies van der Rohe’s assertion that the spirit must nevertheless be given continued opportunity for existence, Frampton reads Ando’s work as an alternative attempt at

transcendence that substitutes a symbolic nature worship for overt references to the sacred. In today’s cultural environment, given the public’s ambivalence to overtly religious evocations, The River might be understood as leaving tantalizingly open the question of how the religious community for which the building is intended will choose to inhabit the space. Perhaps what one sees at work is that the idea of a temple where human activity is directed toward the gods has been supplanted with an architectural conception of sacred space that functions instead as a means of sacralizing human activity. 

NOTES

1. Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, (Trinity University Press, 1962, reprinted 2013), xvii.
2. Quoted in Danièle Pauly, *Le Corbusier: la chapelle de Ronchamp, the chapel at Ronchamp*, translation to English by Sarah Parsons, (Birkhäuser, 1997), 62.
3. See Josep Quetglas, “Ronchamp: A Landscape of Visual Acoustics” in *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscape*, ed. Jean-Louis Cohen (MoMA, 2013), 212-218.
4. See Le Corbusier’s sketches titled, “The Outside is always an inside,” in *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning*, originally published in French 1930 (MIT Press, 1991), 78-9.
5. “The artwork is never an added difficulty,” Conversation with Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, in *SANAA: Sejima & Nishizawa New Museum New York* (Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona, 2010), 15-29.
6. Grace Farms, publicity brochure published by the Grace Farms Foundation, n.d.
7. Grace Community Church Mission Statement, <http://gracecommunity.info/our-mission/>
8. Kenneth Frampton, “The Secular Spirituality of Tadao Ando,” in *Constructing the Ineffable: Contemporary Sacred Architecture*, ed. Karla Britton (Yale, 2010), 96-112.

Sacred Landscapes: Meanings and Contradictions

By Norman Crowe



Mt. Taylor, New Mexico, is called Kaweshtima by the Ácoma; Tsiipiya by the Hopi; Tsiibina by the Laguna; and Dwankwi Kyabachu Yalanne by the Zuni.

Land and landscape are two very different things. A parcel of land as a commodity, defined by its borders and judged by its economic potential, describes a different world than the landscape of nature seen as a vital part of the earth.

The landscape features on the diagram by William Morrish (*facing page*) suggest the meaning and form of the landscape as it is understood by the pueblo people in the American Southwest as well as the Navajo tribe whose reservation occupies much of the land depicted in the diagram. Native belief in the sacredness of the landscape of their ancestral homeland reminds us all of what is ultimately important. Of course the actual domain of the Navajo Reservation and reservations of each of the 19 pueblos of the Rio Grande Valley is legally defined by meticulously surveyed borders, but the idea of the landscape is in the indigenous people's recognition of their lands' natural features and extent. For instance, the Navajo's sense of their traditional domain is the land generally defined by the four mountains

shown at the ends of those dashed lines in the diagram. All the while the actual shape of their reservation stair-steps at right angles, responding to the continental grid of township lines and sections and the political configurations of counties as well as various convenient points that serve as benchmarks for surveyors' reference. In other words, it is as though this place is two places at once: a legal domain marked by legal borders and a natural one marked by sacred mountains.

Inevitably these two ways of understanding natural landscapes across the world come into conflict, especially where the land is regarded as sacred by traditional societies who have been nurtured by it for millennia. This is the case in particular with the mountain to the south in the diagram, labeled "Mt. Taylor." It was named for Zachary Taylor because he was US president at the time it was recorded on the first detailed map of the region. In other words, its modern name is more or less arbitrary.

By contrast, its significance to indigenous cultures is far from arbitrary. It is sacred to the New Mexico Rio Grande Valley pueblos of Acoma, Laguna, and Tesuque and to the Hopi of Arizona as well as to the widespread

formerly nomadic Navajo tribe. Today, most of Mt. Taylor is National Park and National Forest Service land, but unfortunately—because the mountain is believed to hold extensive deposits of uranium ore beneath the grasslands and timber on its slopes—the federal services responsible for it and the New Mexico State Legislature have been pressured by mining interests to open areas of the mountain to mineral exploration. The mining companies' proposals have so far been successfully countered through lobbying efforts and legal action by a committee formed by the five tribes along with several non-tribal organizations sympathetic to their cause, but their task is a particularly difficult one, and here is why. Defining what is each tribe's sacred domain and then convincing governmental authorities of its importance to the respective cultures cannot be quantified. For instance, each tribe recognizes certain areas on the mountain as ancestral domains where they have gathered over hundreds of years to conduct rituals that ultimately are important to their identity as a people, but no one lives on any of these sites and each sacred site has no specific identifiable borders to define its extent. These are places in nature, their sacredness sensed by

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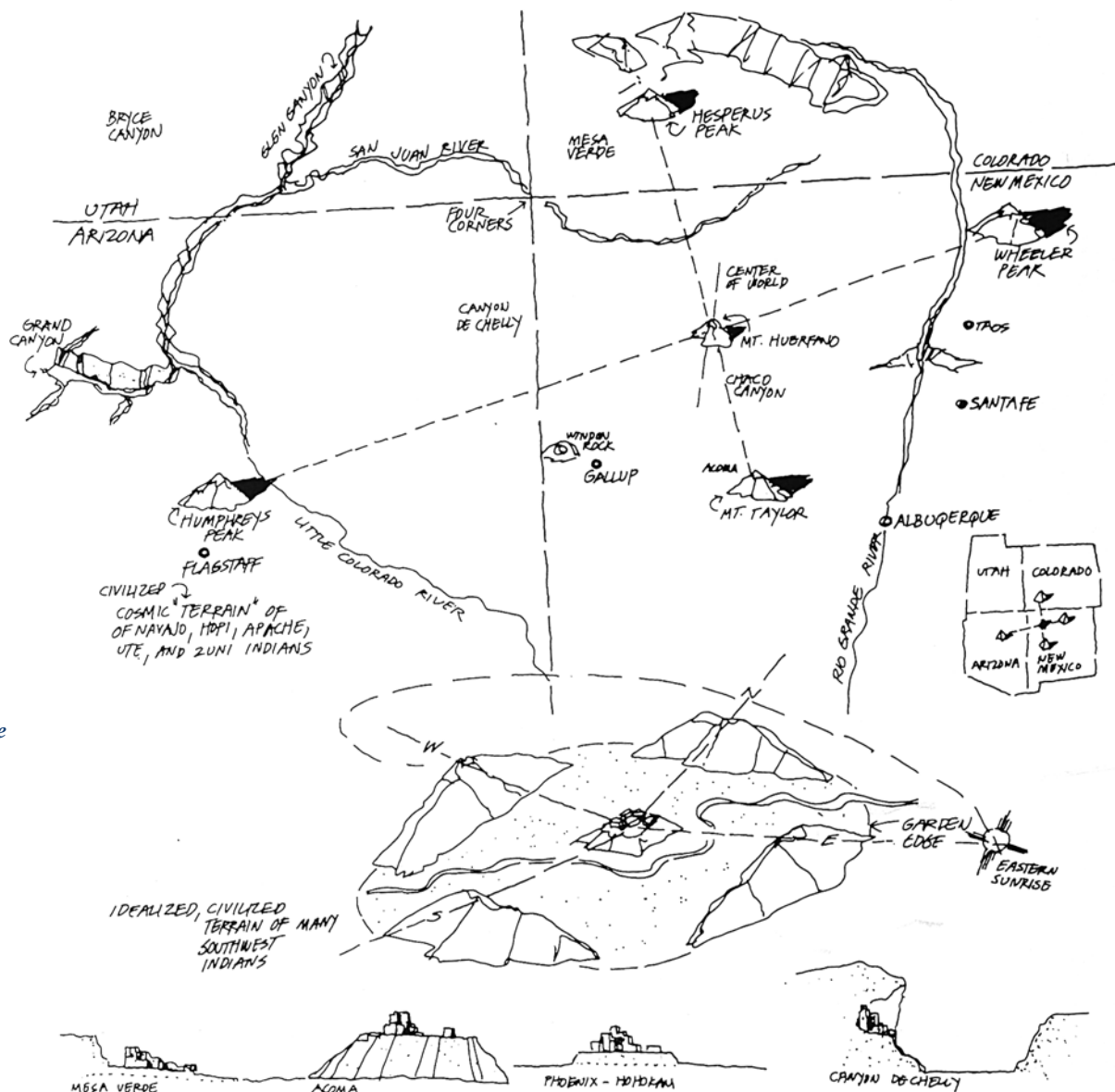



Diagram by William Morrish of the landscape where New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona come together, drawn as it is understood by Native Americans who have lived there for centuries.

an understanding arising from eons of rituals conducted there. Each site is so inextricably woven into the cultural practices and identity of the tribe that holds it to be sacred, that if it is desecrated, pride, meaning, a shared history, and their dignity as a people is at stake. Conveying all this to hard-nosed politicians and legal authorities takes time and patience, while the economic argument having to do with jobs and expanding economic opportunities for the region by the mining industry can be convincingly quantified with what appears as irrefutable numbers. By comparison, the tribes' interests seem ephemeral at best.

This situation, as I have described it, takes place in a particular landscape at a particular location on Earth and it is of concern to certain indigenous populations who still live there. But at its base it is universal. I describe it here only as an example. We can all recognize beauty in a landscape, and in response we may sense a spiritual dimension as well. A

landscape we regard as beautiful evokes a sense of harmonious order. If ancestral, the order of the landscape defines a sacred place, likely with specific sacred places within it, but if we simply happen upon it and are struck by it, we are nonetheless inspired by those same qualities of harmony-in-the-land that nurture those who may have lived there for millennia. And it is not only the immediately recognizable elements of the land itself that may evoke a sense of harmony, but its temporal presence beneath the sky and the ever-changing light of days, and by extension the more distant but unseen presence of the changing season and even what we may know of its geological formation long before life on Earth and its eventual colonization by evolving life. The landscape of nature is the ancestral home of us all. Our DNA predisposes us to seek harmony out of chaos, and it is in our perception of the natural landscape that we unconsciously seek a harmonious presence on Earth. Spirituality and sacredness is not an

all-or-nothing thing, but more often a delicate awareness of the presence of something unique that is at the same time a part of something greater—the earth itself—of which it is a part.

The consummate reductionist finds comfort in viewing the world as a quantifiable thing, its extent and content fully knowable—like the surveyed borders of those Indian reservations. If that is the extent of knowing, it can only come about by wearing blinders that shut out all that cannot be known by the numbers. Pascal, as far back as the 17th century, foresaw the problem: "There are two equally dangerous extremes, to shut reason out, and to let nothing else in." The great mystery, a sense of wonder and universal mystery, connects us inexorably with all else. In opening ourselves to the beauty of a landscape we become a part of it, and by extension a part of all else. That seems to me as the right frame of mind to address the broader environmental problems we face today. 

Healing Gardens as Transformative Spaces

By Virginia Burt, FCSLA, FASLA

Often I am asked, “What makes a healing garden healing?” The answer is: any garden is healing and research proves it to be so. It has been my experience, however, that deep transformative experiences can be facilitated in gardens designed specifically for healthcare settings. Healing gardens and exterior natural spaces within healthcare settings create liminal spaces that facilitate transformation in individuals, small groups, and communities.

In *Revisioning the Earth*, Paul Devereaux’s practical guide to using the power and energy of nature to heal ourselves (1996), he writes that a “liminal condition is a phase of transition between different states of being, and can apply to a wide variety of circumstances – social, ritual, temporal, and spatial.” Educator Edmund O’Sullivan (1999) sees the inherent potential therein. Exploring healing gardens as liminal spaces that move beyond traditional landscape architecture into the realm of transformative learning can lead to “a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thoughts, feelings and actions...that dramatically alters our way of being in the world.” Further, a deep shift can result in spiritual experiences – this may include simply stopping to take a breath of air, both grounding and uplifting one and allowing spirit to ride in on the breath; or perhaps a heightened awareness of connectedness to something far greater than we are.

WAITING IN LIMINAL SPACE

Healing gardens are intentionally designed to provide a physical space that supports people who are dealing with disruptions in their lives: the present is confusing and the future uncertain. A person or a loved one with a challenging health issue is waiting in liminal space, suspended at the threshold of new experiences. When a healing garden is designed specifically to attend to this dynamic and exponential

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The author walking the labyrinth at the Schneider Healing Garden at Seidman Cancer Center.



‘Fire Sculpture’ is found on the journey through the healing garden.

shift for people, it becomes a space for potential transformation. The Schneider Healing Garden at Seidman Cancer Center (SCC) in Cleveland, Ohio, is one such liminal space, located at the threshold that separates SCC from the vibrant city at the door. The healing nature is emphasized as one’s eye is drawn to the church across the street, creating a visual linkage to spiritual practice regardless of one’s religion or spiritual belief.

ITERATIVE DESIGN PROCESS

Gardens as transformative spaces are best designed using an iterative process that engages people—patients, family members, caregivers, volunteers, staff, donors, and management—so the design of the place is meaningful to all involved. During the participatory input sessions for the Schneider Healing Garden, cancer survivors, family members, and caregivers asked for an “oasis,”



The healing garden as experienced from high above in a hospital room.



Visitors write reflections on the healing garden's labyrinth.



Healing garden light colors are tuned to the seven chakras.

a place to “take a breath.” The essence of this space is an archetypal “island,” as described by Julie Messervy (1996). When I used this intention to create “somewhere else instead” in this new space, it provided clarity for each design decision.

Human-made transformative spaces often encompass four physical aspects: Gateway, Boundary, Center, Path. Each of these aspects can provide opportunities for individuals to explore on their own, and they also relate to programming for learning opportunities in “communitas,” as described by Paul Devereaux. These gardens do not stand on their own as liminal, healing spaces. Healing experiences are created through the ongoing interaction of people, place, and programming. Hanne De Jaegher and others (2007) describe this in *Participatory Sense-Making*. Most interpersonal understanding, they write, is “done in the live, real-time, sometimes precarious, connecting between people in an ongoing social encounter.” This is the world of dynamic co-emergence, resulting in transformative learning.

“People” are all those who are involved in experiencing the garden. “Place” implies that the garden is not a leftover space between buildings, disconnected from what happens inside, but integral to the whole. The Schneider Healing Garden, for example, is adjacent to the front entry where it is seen immediately from the vehicular drop off. The garden is also seen from every floor above by approximately 2,000 patients and caregivers in surrounding buildings. “Programming” includes the multiple and singular experiences that are actually held in the garden, everything from a single person connecting to the planned environment of the garden, to small group experiences, to community-wide events.

PROVIDING PATHS TO CONNECTION

Transformative learning and shifts into spiritual experience happens in many ways. When viewing life from a spiritual perspective, we see ourselves connected--to the unknowable and to something far greater

than we are. Here are some examples from the Schneider Healing Garden:

In the healing garden, visitors become immediately immersed in unusual plants and trees as they make the journey down a ramped path to arrive at a carved stone labyrinth, whose center is an omphalos of possible experience – a metaphoric liminal space unto itself. Walks are programmed by the chaplains within SCC, who invite individuals or groups to experience three “Ts”: Initiation (taking the first step, facing one’s fears); Illumination (arriving at the center rose, achieving understanding); Integration (following turns taking along the path, learning along the way). During one such walk held on the winter solstice, people carried candles signifying bringing light to the shortest day of the year. Prayer, meditation, intention, contemplation, and spiritual exercises are stimulated. During and after the walk, a temporal experience in community, participants released emotions from tears to laughter, shared insights into their journey with cancer, and expressed a deepening understanding and clarity.

Air, earth, wind, and fire are represented in the healing garden through a variety of sculptural elements, arranged in four cardinal directions, to provide natural distraction and stimulate reflection. Staff held a harvest event for patients, families, and caregivers to walk the labyrinth together, then experienced these sculptural elements as symbols of their journey, and then engaged in writing Haiku poetry about their experiences in the garden.

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A father of six young children, at SCC for extended treatment, told me that he was unable to visit the healing garden due to his immune deficiency. However, each night he would look down from his sixth-floor room and trace the labyrinth with his finger. The garden is intentionally accented with lighting programmed to cycle through all seven colors of the *chakras* (centers of spiritual power in the body). He described the experience as the one thing that helped him cope with the anxiety of treatment and remain strong with his children.

In another instance, a self-employed businessman, diagnosed with cancer, was required to remain at SCC for 30 days of treatment. During this time, he insisted that caregivers and family alike unhook his treatment port daily to allow him to go to the healing garden. His wife found me there by chance one day and said, “This space, this garden, is the only thing that kept my husband here. Thank you, thank you so much for creating it.”

One hospital administrator took a difficult staff member out into the garden for meetings to physically and literally “clear the air.”

Examples such as these tell us that healing gardens that are carefully designed and programmed for human experience and transition can lead to profound experiences and opens visitors to the possibility of transformative learning and spiritual connectedness. Devereux describes this well: “In our effort to understand place, [we find that] those liminal spaces...where visions can be had, where hierophanies can erupt, or boundaries...can be breached, are the greatest teachers.”

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The *Un*-Cloister

A neighborhood church opens itself up to its neighborhood by employing some sensitive landscape design.

By Thomas Fisher, Assoc. AIA

The new entry garden at the corner of Portland and Grotto streets is a gesture of welcome.



CLOISTERS HAVE A LONG HISTORY in religious architecture, places closed to the outside world, places of seclusion. And so, when Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul, Minnesota, took down the cloister that it had erected in the 1960s and opened up the corner of its urban site to the diverse neighborhood around it, it sent an important signal not only to the community, but to the congregation as well.

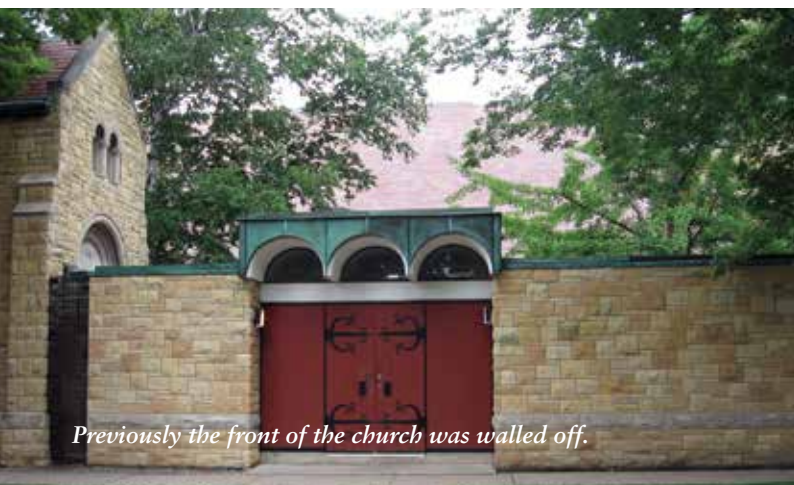
DIRECTOR OF THE METROPOLITAN DESIGN CENTER AT THE COLLEGE OF DESIGN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, AS WELL AS THE DAYTON HUDSON CHAIR IN URBAN DESIGN, THE AUTHOR IS ALSO A FORMER DEAN AT MINNESOTA.

"The cloister had a lot of problems," says Paul May, an associate principal of the architecture firm for the project, Miller Dunwiddie. "It created a long, cold entry into the sanctuary and had a few steps, so it wasn't ADA compliant." But, in addition to its functional flaws, "the cloister walled off the community," says the church's Executive Director Barbara Hubbard, "with stone walls and solid, red doors facing the street corner."

Like all buildings, churches reflect the temper of the times in which they're built, and Unity's architectural evolution illustrates the point. The church's sanctuary—a

yellow-limestone, gable-roofed structure with a corner steeple marking the original entrance—was completed in 1906, the year that its designer, Thomas Holyoke, set up his own practice after working for nearly 20 years for the renowned St. Paul architect, Cass Gilbert. In 1921, the congregation added a parish hall, and in 1923, a chapel, both designed by Holyoke's firm. Those buildings, in a restrained English-Gothic style, created an L-shaped structure, with a lawn facing the street corner like those of the late-19th and early-20th century houses in the surrounding neighborhood.

While St. Paul did not experience the degree of disinvestment and abandonment that other cities its size faced after the 1950s, the neighborhood around Unity did change, and after a fire in the sanctuary in 1963 the church turned to one of its members, Richard Hammel, a founding partner of the Minneapolis architecture firm HGA, for the rebuilding. The cloister went up as part of that renovation. It enclosed the corner of the lot and created, intentionally or not, a fortress-like feel, with blank stone walls along the streets and with heavy wood doors and exaggerated metal hardware that, while echoing the English Gothic appearance of the original building, only reinforced the cloister's medieval castle-like character.



Previously the front of the church was walled off.



With the wall removed, the church is now fully accessible.

The closed appearance of the building, though, did not reflect the openness of the congregation, long known for its community outreach and social-justice work. And so, some 50 years after the cloister went up, the congregation decided to take it down as part of a master plan prepared by Miller Dunwiddie. In its place, they asked the architects to design a new welcoming and inviting entry, while improving functionality and accessibility, achieving environmental sustainability, and upgrading the building's infrastructure. They wanted something that, as May says, "would be a beacon to the neighborhood." In that, they certainly succeeded.

Down came the blank stone walls and in their place the architects created a gently sloped walk that provides a accessible entrance at the level of the main sanctuary and parish hall, with benches for viewing new garden space and a new remembrance fountain. Yellow limestone, matching that of the original building, clads the garden walls and the piers framing the new glass entryway. Rather than appearing to need a password to get into the former cloister, you now follow a curving path up to a lobby whose tall glass windows help you feel a part of the place even before you have entered.


The new entry gallery interior continues the sense of being inside and outside at the same time. Its glass wall curves around the original entry tower, echoing the curve of the ramping walk outside, while a wood trellis brings the tall lobby space down to human scale and partly shades the windows, while reinforcing the garden-like quality of the outdoor space. Even the floor of the lobby, with its variegated porcelain tile, responds to the similarly hued pavers in the walk outside. "We wanted to reach out to the community," says Hubbard, "and be seen as a viable partner" with the diverse neighborhood around the church. In taking down its walls and opening up its entrance, the congregation has sent that message, loud and clear.



View from above shows how the garden reaches out to the corner.



New entry gallery works in unison with garden to create a welcoming reception.

The Unitarians have a long history of supporting significant architecture, be it Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois, or Louis Kahn's First Unitarian Church in Rochester, New York. But this denomination also has a healthy skepticism of the highly ornamented and visually overwhelming enclosures that have characterized the architecture of other faiths. You can see that simpler and humbler tradition at work in St. Paul's Unity Church. "We wanted to return the church to what it was," says project architect Jean Turck, and in doing so the architects have reminded us of what the Unitarian church—thankfully—still is. 

The Sacred Language of Trees

by A.T. Mann

We can learn much from the beauty of trees, their infinite variety, their inspiration, their emotional significance, their spiritual heritage and symbolism, the psychology they engender and their sheer independence. There are many ways in which trees contribute much more to our well being and sense of rootedness in nature.

In the early 1970s, I moved to England with my daughter and soon met friends interested in music, the visual arts, theater, writing, Jungian psychology, symbolism, and the traditional bohemian culture of Europe. We often travelled to North Wales to visit a close friend who lived in Plas Llandecwyn, which stood on a hilltop near Harlech Castle (built in 1283), and within view of Mount Snowdon, the ancient Druid initiation center.

Plas had stacked stone and slate walls four feet thick, which protected the voluminous interior from the howling winds that blasted across the hillsides. The main entrance hall carried a magnetic presence that you could feel. One day I swung my crystal pendulum over the central octagonal stone in the hall, and it immediately began an odd series of movements: it swung back and forth several times in a particular direction, and then rotated 60 degrees in a clockwise direction and started swinging again. It repeated this unusual movement until completing a circle. I plotted the exact directions with a compass on a diagram of the house, and after a while realized that the pendulum might be pointing at something outside of the house. I went out to investigate and what I found was extraordinary. Each of the angles pointed toward trees that surrounded the house. What is more, the oak, willow, ash, hawthorn, holly, and hazel trees were a part of the ancient Celtic tree language. They formed a magical ring that ostensibly protected and sanctified the place from its earliest days. This discovery brought a feeling of sheer bliss.

At that time I was just learning about what Robert Graves called the Beth-Luis-Nion Celtic tree alphabet for a chapter in the

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Aristocrats



Sondrio



Chinese trees



Early Hamite trees

Early alphabets inspired by trees.

Phenomenon Book of Calendars, which we were writing and creating.¹ In the process, I discovered that networks of sacred trees, likely planted by Druid priests, stretched over that part of Wales.

The first temples were trees ceremonially decorated with symbols of the gods, who were often symbolic forces of nature. Indeed, tree-tops hit by lightning were seen as powerful, as they formed the letter "T," hence names like thunder, Thor, temple, and Thursday. Early temple architecture reflected the glory of these simple forces and places by abstracting elements of the natural world into architecture. As the architect William Lethaby stated:

When the world was a tree, every tree was in some sort its representation; when a tent or a building, every tent or building; but

when the relation was firmly established, there was action and reaction between the symbol and the reality, and ideas taken from one were transferred to the other, until the symbolism became complicated, and only particular buildings would be selected for the symbolic purpose: certain forms were reasoned from the building to the world, and conversely certain thoughts of the universe were expressed in the structure thus set apart.²

Rows or groves of trees inspired sacred architecture and we can still see their forms abstracted in the columns, capitals, and decorations of revered buildings through the ages.

We are all connected in a web of nature, although many today deny this. However, it is essential that we understand the role trees



Indian sacred trees decorated with white painted rings.

play in our planetary health, providing the air we breathe, many fruits, foods, and medicines we use, the wood we use to build our homes, the paper we use to print our books, and much more.

The beginning of language and the creation of the earliest alphabets evolved from tree shapes and branches, which were pressed into clay tablets, just as the Druids translated these shapes into runes, and they were later further abstracted until now few realize that each letter is a symbol in itself.³ The relevance of trees in early history brings a new understanding of language and form, because they hold a key to language.

We speak to trees and they respond. We snuggle among their roots so they can comfort us. We touch their rough skin and feel a bond with deeply felt nature. We look up through their leaves that dance in

sunlight. Trees, shrivelling from drought, talk to us about their pain, as canaries in mines warn us that we might soon be fighting for our breath. Yet, in full knowledge of the dire implications of their cries, we cut trees down by the millions, with no regard for the paucity of oxygen that action will cause to our own lungs and those of all living things.

If trees are us, how did this happen? And if we revere them, why do we destroy them?

Trees are an essential element of our outer and inner lives, whether or not we realize this. Our first step as stewards of the earth is to learn about and then teach the sanctity and importance of nurturing trees, by respecting, planting, and maintaining them. We should begin by appreciating all that trees do for us, in their silent ways.



Yggdrasil World Ash Tree of Scandinavian mythology.

Folk tales and legends present forests as dark, mysterious places where we can lose our way. It is there that heroes and heroines face unexpected challenges or discover hidden secrets, and often identities are disguised or magically hidden. The magic of forests lies in ideas people have about trees. All over the world trees appear as mysterious ladders or gateways between worlds, sources of life and wisdom, and as the physical forms of supernatural or magical beings, yet increasingly the young in the West avoid if not fear forests and trees, to the extent that psychologists have identified pathology they call “Nature Deficit Disorder.”⁴

There is something spectacular about trees especially when you are in them, because you can feel their aliveness, their longevity, and almost experience their souls, as I did when I was a child climbing in them and beholding the night sky. It has even been postulated

that walking in dense forests is a kind of powerful natural therapy, a remedy to life in our modern civilization.⁵ The true value of trees cannot be underestimated, yet we have little real perception of how essential they are to our world, not only in physical and material terms, but also in spiritual and psychological ways. Recent research by architects in Scotland demonstrated the positive psychological value of trees and nature.⁶ Until we learn to value trees, their protection cannot be insured forever. It is essential to educate the young and old to the value of trees, to teach them to learn to embrace and love them like family, and even to learn the language of trees because recycling is just not enough—we need to learn to love nature.

From above a rural village in India, we see magnificent trees around a central square, and it seems that protective trees embrace every house. Rings of white paint identify sacred

trees, with untold numbers of objects hanging from their low-lying branches as symbols of fertility, as children play around the tree roots. Banyan trees spread their branches in a protective ring close to the ground, which gradually sprout new trees, symbolizing their solidity, fertility, and good fortune. People identify their own “family trees” and nurture them like members of the family, look after their needs, and protect their interests. The health of the tree reflects the health and wellbeing of the family and by extension, the entire village.

Trees purify the environment, their twigs are incense, they bear fruits, nuts, and medicines, and it is believed that trees transmit healing energies to the surrounding families within the village. The tree is even more potent and auspicious when it houses termite nests or cobra lairs in its base. Recent studies show that such anomalous beliefs have strong correlations: termites burrow around their nests for hundreds of yards, making the surrounding land much more fertile than usual, and the cobras clear the villages of small predators, protecting their crop storage and houses. This kind of integration with nature is almost totally lacking in Western culture, which is a profound realization.

While myths seem outlandish to many in our contemporary age, they are basic to our inner reality. In the blockbuster movie, *Avatar*, the blue-skinned Na’vi people maintained a direct communication with all biological life on their planet through a visceral connection with a tree deity called Eywa. They literally link up to their home “tree of souls.” Both Indian or Balinese village trees and the Avatar sacred tree allow initiates to connect with ancestors and experientially tap into the living biological matrix that sustains all life. It is now known that mycelium fungi form a communication network below ground, protecting “mother trees.”⁷ In many places around the world, they are literally family trees. It is now known that trees have their own social networks within forests, connecting with each other for many collective purposes.⁸

Early humanity recognized that sacred places were in the sky and earth, but they also found the divine in trees. Legends of a “World Tree” abound in most early cultures, such as the trees of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life of the Hebrew Kabbalah, the sacred oak groves of the Druids, and the apple trees sacred to the Roman goddess Venus. The Yggdrasil World Ash Tree in Norse myth rises up from the center of the earth, its branches forming the heavens of the gods and its roots striking down into hell,



Treetops pointing to the sky.

where a serpent is entwined at the world's dark core. This tree represents the shape and fate of the world and determines the welfare of the universe. Beneath the roots is the well where the three female "fates" spin the courses of human lives.


Vegetation symbols abound in older monuments and buildings Europe, wherever one looks, particularly in the carvings amidst the architecture, in the roof crossings, in the form and symbols of tombs, and of course in the stained glass of the cathedrals. Schama mentions the representations of Bacchus (like Pan or Dionysus), Druidic oak twigs, leaves, and acorns that abound in the rose windows, which are obvious symbols of rebirth and resurrection.⁹

Trees are natural receptors, accumulators, and transmitters of wave energy beyond sunlight.¹⁰ The structure of trees (DNA, leaves, needles, branches, roots, and the crown as a whole), and the materials of which they are composed (complex organic chemistry, sap, resin, wood, and the waxy coating of needles) are natural wave-receptors and energy accumulators. Conifer tree needles are prototypes for man-made spike antennas, and traditional antennas are simply imitations of the branching structure of trees. We can learn much about the ecology of natural energy systems by studying and understanding trees.

Direct perception of the plant world is available to us through our heart, as well as through our mind or our science.¹¹ We are taught to think objectively about nature, a habit that the modern scientific paradigm insists we accept as the only valid way, however they imply a separation from the process being studied. Unfortunately, this distances us from the natural world. Categorizing and "explaining" nature totally misses the essential point—we have much to learn from nature—and

this can only happen if we are open to its languages, transmitted through being in nature, hearing the natural sounds of animals and plants, and through the substances that we ingest, smell, and use as medicines or psychotropic drugs. Even if we have the inclination, we don't always listen in the ways that we should, but tend to see nature as mute, an exhibition to be observed and studied, rather than a critical element of the consciousness of planet Earth. This might be because trees live so long that their changes take lifetimes of our time. We think that science knows best, even as we collude to put nature in supreme peril because of our irresponsible stewardship.

At one time old-growth forests existed across all continents, including most of Japan, the entire British Isles, most of the Americas, Iceland, Europe, Central Asia, and much of the Far East. The only places on earth where such environments still exist, apart from the Pacific Northwest, are Chile, Tasmania, and the South Island of New Zealand, albeit being much smaller in size and reach. We have already done and continue to destroy this precious legacy of the few remaining forests of great trees.¹²

Evocative images of a modern day tree of life seem fanciful to us, but they are among the most visual and poetic expressions of early humanity's need to make the connection between earth and heaven tangible. Throughout northern Europe and North America are forests of sacred trees and the mounds, where early people communed with their nature divinities. So many phenomena of nature, such as fertility, creativity, sexuality, wisdom, knowledge, and many other profound qualities of humanity, are described in relation to the tree. Rain comes through holes in the fabric of the world tree. If one climbs high enough, one can ascend to heaven. Various regions of the tree's growth symbolize places where men and their souls exist. It is as though the universe were seen as a giant tree house wherein humanity, the angels, the gods, and devils all live, their domains determined by their various levels, all connected as a vast, eternal living organism. 

1. *The Phenomenon Books of Calendars*, Phenomenon Publications, London, 1973-1980.
2. Lethaby, W.R., *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, Dover, New York, 2004. p. 35.
3. See Kallir, Alfred, *Sign and Design: The Psychogenetic Source of the Alphabet*, Clarke & Co, London, 1961.
4. Ibid.
5. *Shinrin Yoku*, also called *Forest Bathing* in Japan is an increasingly popular form of nature therapy. Also see Louv, Richard, *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting With Life in a Virtual Age*, Algonquin Books, 2012.
6. Salon, September 21, 2013, "Parks make us smarter — science proves it!" Amazing new studies and brain results show nature reduces aggression, fights depression. Henry Grabar.
7. The new documentary film, "Mother Trees," describe the significance of these ideas. See the trailer at <http://bit.ly/20y5Irl>
8. Wohlleben, Peter, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate — Discoveries From a Secret World*, to be published by Greystone Books, Canada, 2016.
9. Ibid, p. 218.
10. Megre, Vladimir, Anastasia: *The Ringing Cedars*, Ringing Cedars Press, Henderson, NV, 2008. p. 7. Megre covers this material in the *Ringing Cedars* series of books.
11. See Buhner, Stephen Harrod, *The Secret Teachings of Plants in the Direct Perception of Nature*, Bear & Co., Rochester, 2006.
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Bankston Green

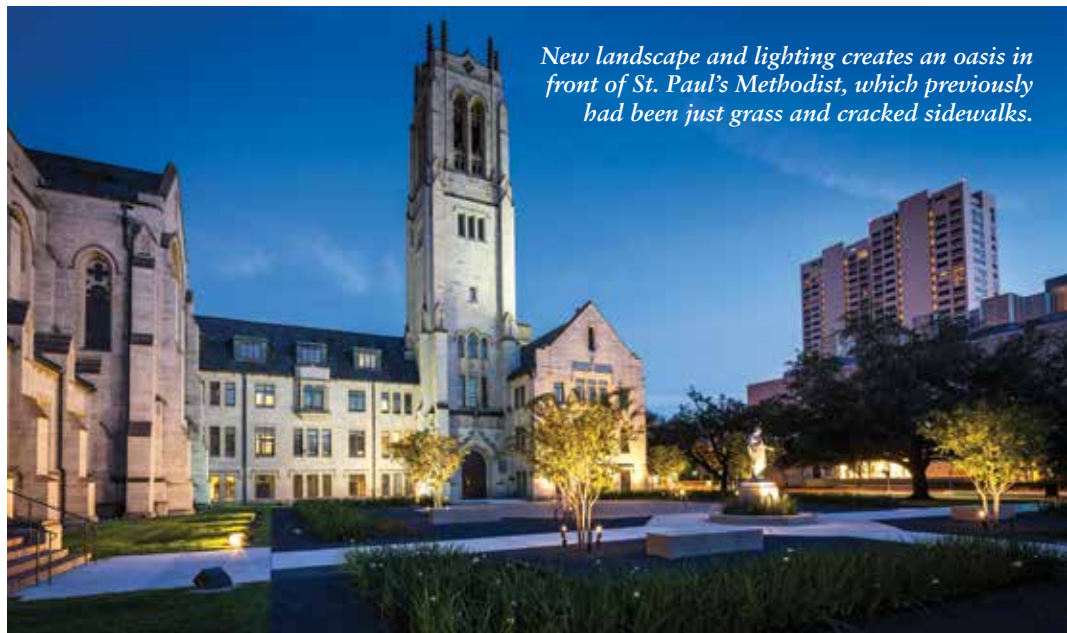
Landscape architecture creates a respite on the campus of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.

By James Powell, AIA
Photographs by Jonnu Singleton

The Bankston Green project at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas, completely renovates the front yard of the original church building, designed by Alfred Finn in 1929. The result of the second phase of a long-term master plan developed by our firm, Merriman Holt Powell Architects, the project creates a new prayer garden with a large labyrinth, offering an oasis for prayer and contemplation for members and the over two million annual visitors to the city's surrounding museum district.

St. Paul's wanted Bankston Green (named after the church's longest serving senior pastor, Dr. James L. Bankston) to transform the original front yard of the church, a prominent but under-utilized area of the campus, into a sacred space that would invite the public and supplement church ministry. Largely unchanged since its original construction, the site had rarely been used due to its lack of intended purpose, narrow broken sidewalks, absence of shade, and poor drainage. The design is organized on the bell tower axis, giving it a formal sense of procession from the sidewalk. Broad steps and a gently sloping sidewalk provide comfortable and accessible paths to the site. A continuous low retaining wall at the periphery of the site provides an urban edge and offers an amenity to pedestrians.

Natchez crepe myrtles provide shade over slab stone benches, and were selected to offer solar protection without overwhelming the scale of the prayer garden or blocking sight lines from the street to the historic sanctuary. African lilies and Asian jasmine provide a relaxing setting with a soft, green edge to the outdoor "room." An existing Christus statue was relocated to the center of the prayer garden atop a new, taller stone pedestal to protect it and provide a greater sense of reverence. Black Star gravel flows between the benches and trees and around the labyrinth to provide a comfortable walking surface that is pervious to water, which significantly reduces the storm water detention requirement for the project.



New landscape and lighting creates an oasis in front of St. Paul's Methodist, which previously had been just grass and cracked sidewalks.

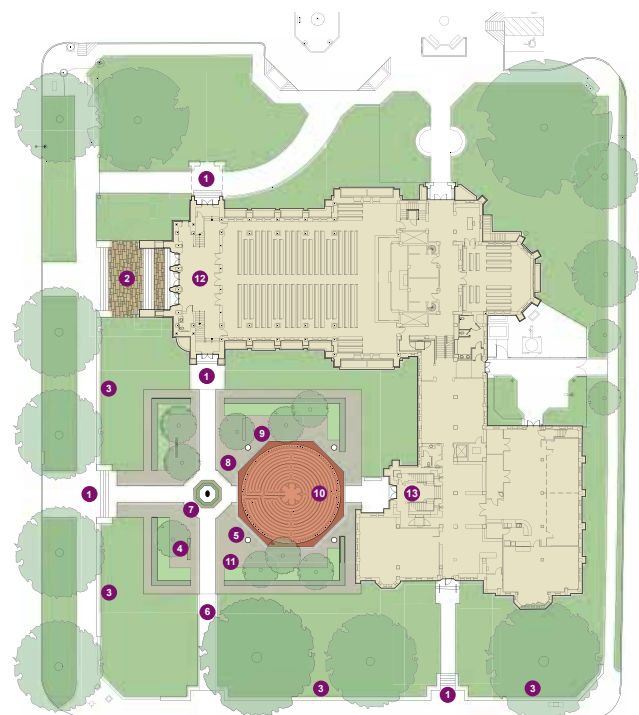
Right: Bankston Green reaches out to the surrounding neighborhood, with welcoming benches and a central labyrinth.

Below left: Pathways and an axial Christus statue help to orient visitors to the sanctuary.

Below right: Central labyrinth becomes a place of informal gathering with pervious surfaces to add in drainage.



- 1 STAIR
- 2 RENOVATED STONE PLAZA
- 3 CONCRETE SEAT WALL
- 4 STONE BENCH
- 5 POLE LIGHT FIXTURE
- 6 SLOPING SIDEWALK (FOR THE DISABLED)
- 7 STONE PLANTER & PLINTH FOR STATUE OF JESUS
- 8 BLACK STAR GRAVEL WALKING SURFACE
- 9 CREPE MYRTLE TREES
- 10 LABYRINTH
- 11 ASIAN JASMINE & AFRICAN LILLIES LANDSCAPING
- 12 CHURCH NARTHEX
- 13 BELL TOWER



THE AUTHOR IS A PARTNER WITH MERRIMAN HOLT POWELL ARCHITECTS IN HOUSTON, TEXAS.

NOTES & COMMENTS

NOT BUILDING FOR ISLAM IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities Across the Islamic World, edited by Mohammad Gharipour, (Lieden, The Netherlands: Brill), 2014.

An anthology can be like a good movie that can be viewed in multiple ways, and builds towards an overarching narrative. The editor's challenge is to balance a diversity of readings with a clear motif for the whole. In *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities Across the Islamic World*, Mohammad Gharipour takes on the gargantuan task on putting together a volume on how non-Muslim sacred architecture came to life, metamorphosed or simply co-existed in Muslim geographies, cultures, and communities since the beginning of the religion in 622 until today (622 is year one in Islam, starting with the *Hijra*, the travel of Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Medina). Covering about 1,400 years of Islamic history, and spanning a geography of three continents, the spaces examined range from physical structures (in Turkey, Morocco, Tunis, Palestine, and others) to non-physical sacred formations (in Nigeria, Mali).

Nonetheless, architecture is often peripheral in the 25 essays of this collection. They lay out religious, social, cultural, political, economic, and historical narratives, and are grouped into four categories: Identity, Design, Construction, and Re-use. In his introductory essay, Gharipour says that his anthology "emphasizes the breath and complexity of Islam as an agent of social, cultural, and political change," which has been regulating the relationships between Muslim and non-Muslims over centuries. The work is timely and important as it shows the intricacies of sacred architecture within mostly Muslim contexts (the only exception being David Mallia's essay on post-Arab Malta). Interactions among people of different religious persuasions were "complex, varied and nuanced" throughout history, and are especially nowadays in the forefront of popular discourse with the continued rise of interreligious and sectarian violence in the Middle East.

The first section takes on Identity as its subject and frames the collection's critical territory. It explores the mutual relationship between religious, ethnic, and social identities. In particular, Angela Anderson's essay on Alevi sacred precincts of Anatolia sheds interesting light on how even "Muslims [were]

viewed as non-Muslims" in Turkey. Elvan Cobb examines the role of the World Heritage Organization (WHO) in making decisions of what needs to be protected and what does not, in the case of Jerusalem and beyond. The chapter as a whole discusses in seven essays how architecture—at the urban, building, and ornament level—was utilized in order to render religious identities.

The second section on Design explores how non-Muslim minorities employed design, e.g. formal, material, and spatial elements, to express themselves. The first three essays discuss non-Muslim spaces blending in within their contexts. Ann Shafer's work depicts how "Islamic" geometry was utilized in the Church of Santa Barbara and the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. Mohammad Gharipour and Rafael Sedighpour's essay, on the other hand, interrogates the design of synagogues in the Jewish neighborhood of Isfahan by exploring the relationship between urban linkages and synagogue form. The last three essays explore a more assertive architecture with the use of unmediated Western architectural vocabulary, as in Ayla Lepine's essay on the Crimea Memorial Church and Ebru Ozeke Topkemeci's examination of St. Antoine Church, both in Istanbul.

The third section on Construction explores particular ways in which non-Muslim religious sites were erected in collaboration or in conflict within their Muslim contexts. Issues such as power politics, cultural and religious relations, and patronage are discussed. Jennifer Pruitt's essay on the construction of a church in Egypt during the early Fatimid period discusses mythological claims and elucidates the complex relationships between the Christian populace and the Muslim caliphate. All six authors expose the complications involved in constructing new non-Muslim sacred spaces in Muslim contexts.

The anthology's final section, Re-Use, expands in six essays on the trans-use of sacred spaces over time. Suna Guven's article on the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Nicosia, Cyprus, exposes the implications of cultural annexation and appropriation. Guven depicts the historical trajectory of the edifice, which started as a church, and has been used as a mosque since the 16th century by the Muslims north of the city. Heghnar Watenpaugh's essay on the cathedral of Ani explores issues of heritage and trauma. She lays out the political complexities surrounding the preservation of this Armenian heritage site in Eastern Anatolia,

and discusses how preservation efforts have been deeply rooted in socio-political realities, turning this once religious site into a historical one, and later into a tourist destination.

In his introduction, Gharipour describes the objective of the book "to bring together works that might not otherwise be considered together. I have deliberately sought diversity, temporal and geographic, in order to draw into focus areas of difference and similarity." The anthology touches on a broad spectrum of sacred spaces, from intangible polytheistic spaces in Nigeria, to churches in Turkey and North Africa, to synagogues in Iran. The result is a widespread collection, leading the reader to wonder if the "deliberately sought diversity" called for must be as expansive. Most compelling are the contributions in the first two sections on Identity and Design that deal with the material and spatial characteristics of sacred spaces and show us how architectural form, materiality, and decoration blended and contrasted, and articulated religious identities within their host environments. However, what are the "areas of differences and similarities" across these 25 essays? Many of the authors mention the Pact of Umar, a collection of prescriptions intended to control the behavior of non-Muslims who lived under Muslim rule, and disclose that non-Muslims were *Dhimmi*s (people protected by Islam) who had to pay *Jizya* (taxes for non-Muslims), but does this expansive volume reveal any emerging pattern that could help us understand what the commonalities/similarities (physical or otherwise) of non-Muslim sacred spaces were in particular Muslim contexts?

Like a good movie, the essays edited together should create a cumulative effect, a *tertium quid* (third thing) in Sergei Eisenstein's words, that makes the whole greater than the sum its individual parts. Gharipour's collection leaves the reader wanting in this regard. The authors seem to be presenting their own positions, but do not aim to situate themselves within an interactive debate with each another. By the lack of such a dialogue across and between different voices, the work has difficulty in constituting a volume that is diverse yet coherent. However, Gharipour's anthology should be applauded for starting an important conversation. It is a first step in a neglected field of research, which will surely inspire much more work to come. — *Imdat As*

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IMAGINE, FOR A MOMENT, A FOREST, perhaps a redwood grove, with sunlight slanting through the trees. If you have ever stood among the redwoods, it is hard not to feel a sense of the holy, what the theologian Rudolf Otto described as the "numinous." In his book, *The History of Gardens*, landscape scholar Christopher Thacker observes: "The first gardens were not made, but discovered.... In the oldest accounts, such spots [natural features felt to possess a mysterious quality of difference from their surroundings, such as a clearing in the forest, a valley, or island] are the gardens of the gods."

Redwood trees exude a sense of the primordial; they can live thousands of years and have existed on Earth as a species since long before humans. It is easy to forget that vegetation is key to life on Earth: plants provide the oxygen that we breathe, and plants, in turn, need carbon dioxide. This relationship is now out of balance as humans are producing vast quantities of carbon dioxide, too much for the Earth's vegetation to use or sequester. As a result, the Earth is heating up, creating change to the planet's climate, and deforestation is a major result.

The idea that humans and the Earth live in a reciprocal relationship, and that contact with nature is beneficial or healing to humans, has long been an intuitive understanding. But in the last 25 years or so, a growing body of empirical evidence supports that contact with nature, especially vegetation, has a beneficial effect on human physical and psychological health. This includes lower blood pressure, reduced muscle tension, and elevated mood. These are many of the same beneficial effects of a meditative or contemplative practice.

This idea of creating a sacred place in which the power of nature can be experienced as a numinous presence certainly exists, at least for me,

in artist Walter De Maria's "New York Earth Room." The artwork is located in a New York City SoHo brownstone; climbing a flight of stairs visitors are startled to see three feet of black dirt covering the entire floor of a former apartment. It is an inaccessible place of contemplation, it is a garden about the soil. Soil is millions of years old, and, again, it is easy to forget, but soil sustains life and all gardens and forests. In Gilles A. Tiberghien's book *Land Art*, De Maria is quoted saying of this work, "The earth is not only there to be seen, but also to force people to think about it," adding, "God has given us the earth, but we have ignored it." While it is very rare for a contemporary artist to speak so directly to the transcendent (giving the project and his words a great deal of revelatory power), the garden has often been seen as the meeting point between "Heaven and Earth." The German writer and philosopher Rudolf Borchardt wrote, "The human being embodies a tension between a nature which has since been lost and an unreachable Divine Creator. The garden stands at precisely the center of this tension."

A rarified space such as De Maria's "New York Earth Room," and even more ordinary spaces like community gardens, remind us that the soil of our Earth is worthy of our attention and even reverence. Ancient archetypes of forest and clearing continue to resonate qualities of healing and the numinous to us in settings both sacred and secular. 

THE AUTHOR IS A PROFESSOR OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA AND A MULTIMEDIA ARTIST AND DESIGNER WORKING IN SCULPTURE, INSTALLATIONS, AND SITE ART. THIS ESSAY WAS ADAPTED FROM A LONGER PIECE THAT APPEARS IN *Transcending Architecture*, EDITED BY JULIO BERMUDEZ (CUA PRESS, 2015).



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